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SUBJECT: A/S BOUCHER'S MAY 30 MEETING WITH EUROPEAN DDG
YAGI ON CENTRAL ASIA

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary. MOFA DDG for Europe Takeshi Yagi told visiting SCA A/S Richard Boucher that Japan will hold its second round of Foreign Ministerial-level talks with Central Asian nations on Monday, June 5. Tokyo hopes the Central Asian countries will adopt an Action Plan that will include inter-regional cooperation and other areas covered in a diagram that he passed to the Assistant Secretary. Attendance at the meeting is still undecided and Yagi pointed out that a Russian official said that the talks were an "unuseful" rival to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Afghanistan's Foreign Minister will also attend the meeting and Tokyo will stress the importance of its integration through regional projects such as the construction of a highway from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. DDG Yagi said that Japanese Foreign Minister Aso told Uzbeki Deputy Prime Minister Azimov during his Tokyo visit in May that the Japanese government wants more efforts towards democratization and respect for human rights. The Japanese government slashed ODA to Uzbekistan dramatically last year to the two million USD level. Japan hopes that Uzbekistan will better resist efforts to be pushed further into the Russian camp. DDG Yagi noted that Japan, the U.S. and the EU are limited in their Central Asian participation compared to Russia and called for close coordination of Western efforts. End summary.

Japan-Central Asia Foreign Ministerial Talks

¶2. (C) During a May 30 meeting, MOFA DDG for Europe Takeshi Yagi briefed visiting SCA A/S Richard Boucher on plans for Japan's second Foreign Ministerial level consultations with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on June 5 in Tokyo. These consultations started two years ago after then Foreign Minister Yuriko Kawaguchi's trip to Kazakhstan in August 2004 resulted in the group's first meeting. Although Tokyo wanted to meet last summer, the Japanese Diet elections intervened and required MOFA to postpone the meeting, DDG Yagi explained. This year Japan has also invited Afghanistan, and Afghan Foreign Minister Rangeen Spanta has indicated he will attend. Japan hopes the group can adopt a five-point Action Plan, which would include greater intra-regional cooperation. DDG Yagi provided A/S Boucher with a diagram outline of the Action Plan.

¶3. (c) Attendance is still undecided, noted DDG Yagi. Turkmenistan had initially indicated it would send its Foreign Minister but notified Tokyo on May 30 that it would not send anyone -- a move anticipated by MOFA. Kazakhstan has designated its Deputy Foreign Minister as a "Special Envoy" to the meeting. The Uzbek and Tajik governments have promised attendance by their Foreign Ministers, but one can never be sure of who will attend until the day of the meetings, DDG Yagi said.

Russian unease with Japan's approach to Central Asia

¶4. (C) Upon hearing from A/S Boucher of Moscow's attempts to dissuade Central Asian countries from attending a recent U.S.- Central Asia meeting on narcotics in Dushanbe, DDG Yagi opined that the Russians may also be trying to interfere with Japan's upcoming talks. A Russian official told DDG Yagi that the SCO has produced actual cooperation in the region and called approaches by other countries to establish separate mechanisms "unuseful." A/S Boucher encouraged Japan to continue to pursue stronger ties with Central Asia, noting the SCO has not produced much substantively and the development of alternatives to Russia and China is good. While the U.S. does not seek to cut out Russia or China, the recent ability of Kazakhstan to renegotiate with Gazprom demonstrates that Central Asian countries need options to ensure their fair treatment.

Afghanistan

¶5. (C) DDG Yagi agreed with A/S Boucher on the importance
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of involving Afghanistan in regional integration efforts. At next week's conference, Tokyo will stress Afghanistan's role in the region and highlight the importance of projects such as the construction of the highway from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and the building of the Afghan ring road. Japan will also encourage the gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Pakistan, even though its development is a long shot, DDG Yagi said. A/S Boucher expressed appreciation for Japan's support in Afghanistan and the Indian Ocean.

Uzbekistan Woes

¶6. (C) Responding to A/S Boucher's observation that Prime Minister Karimov is closing off contacts and options with the West to move closer to Moscow, DDG Yagi said that during Deputy Prime Minister Asimov's Tokyo visit in May, Foreign Minister Aso told him that Japan wants Uzbekistan's government to make greater efforts toward democratization and respect for human rights. Japan slashed its 10 million USD development assistance program back to 2 million USD last year, including no ODA loans. The Uzbek government suspects that Tokyo is linking its ODA program to greater respect for human rights. DDG Yagi said that although the Japanese government does not want to drive the Uzbeks into the Russian corner, it wants to send them a message.

Western cooperation key

¶7. (C) DDG Yagi said that Japan has limited influence in Central Asia compared to Russia. Therefore, it is important for the U.S., Japan and the EU to coordinate efforts. With joint efforts we can achieve good results in Central Asia and counter Russian influence, he stated.

¶8. (U) Participants:

United States

SCA A/S Richard Boucher
Joseph Donovan, Deputy Chief of Mission
Ann Kambara, Embassy notetaker
Joel Ehrendreich, Embassy Poloff

Japan

Takeshi Yagi, Deputy Director General for Europe, MOFA
Fumio Iwai, Director, Second Middle Eastern Division, MOFA

¶9. (U) A/S Boucher cleared this message.

SCHIEFFER